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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4415
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S OUTREACH IN PUNTA ARENAS AND TORRES DEL PAINE
EMPHASIZES ENVIRONMENTAL COLLABORATION

¶1. (U) Summary: The Ambassador visited Punta Arenas and Torres del Paine National Park, May 12-13, to celebrate the Park's 50th anniversary and to give a speech about the first 100 days of the Obama administration at the University of Magallanes (UMAG). In Punta Arenas, the Ambassador also stopped at Chile's Antarctic Institute to discuss the Institute's research efforts and plans to increase environmental education and establish an Antarctic museum. With the new mayor of Punta Arenas, the Ambassador reviewed several health and education challenges in the city. The Ambassador also held a press conference at the American Corner at UMAG to highlight on-going U.S.-Chile collaboration. The visit received notable press coverage. End summary.

Punta Arenas and Torres del Paine

¶2. (U) Punta Arenas is the most prominent settlement on the Straits of Magellan and the capital of the XII Region, which encompasses Magallanes and Chile's Antarctic territory. With a population of about 120,000, the port city of Punta Arenas is the third largest city in Patagonia and one of Chile's two tax-free zones (the other is the northern port of Iquique). The region's economy depends mainly on exploration and exploitation activities related to oil (petroleum), gas and coal production. Cattle and sheep farming, wool, fishing and tourism are also important economic activities.

¶3. (U) Torres del Paine, situated in the far south, is one of the Chile's most famous national parks. It lies about 300 km north of Punta Arenas, in a transition area between the Magellanic sub-polar forests and the Patagonian steppes. The Cordillera del Paine is the centerpiece of the park, which also encompasses mountains, glaciers, lakes, and rivers. Torres del Paine enjoys a Sister Park relationship with Yosemite National Park.

Chile's Antarctic Institute: Looking to Expand Activities

¶4. (U) The Ambassador, accompanied by Post's ESTH officer and Economic Specialist, met with the Deputy Director of Chile's Antarctic Institute (Instituto Antartico Chileno - INACH) Paulina Julio, as well as INACH's Head of Communications and Education Department, Elas Barticevic; Head of the Project Administration Department, Dr. Javier Arata; Project Administration Department, Environmental Division Researcher, Veronica Vallejos; and Oceanographer Stephen Kraus.

¶5. (SBU) The INACH team was eager to discuss the Institute's on-going research efforts and praised recent visits from Post's public affairs environmental specialist and NASA. NASA plans to

launch flights to measure glacial ice from Punta Arenas late in 2009 and has invited INACH to participate. Several researchers lamented the lack of English capability among researchers and noted several as-yet-to-be-developed plans for creating a research institute to improve collaboration among Antarctic researchers in English and Spanish. Barticevic emphasized the need to increase environmental education and described several initiatives to engage school-age children. Julio said that the Institute has procured a site for establishing an Antarctic museum, but that planning is still in the early stages.

Mayor Discusses Health and Education Challenges

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador had a productive discussion with the new mayor of Punta Arenas, Vladimiro Mimica, an independent. [Note: Mimica, a former socialist and sports commentator, was elected in December 2008 with the highest percentage for a mayoral candidate since the return of democracy. He earned 55 percent of the vote. End note.] Mimica marveled at the array of issues that he is asked to address as the city's mayor, notably providing adequate hospitals, schools, and transportation. He added that teenage drug use is an area of major concern.

¶7. (U) The Ambassador also paid a courtesy call on Rear Admiral Philippe Ojeda, whom he has met several times, to reaffirm on-going Embassy-Navy cooperation.

Outreach: The First 100 Days of the Obama Administration

¶8. (U) The Ambassador held a press conference during his visit to the UMAG American Corner. He also gave a speech on campus called "The First 100 Days of the Obama Administration: A New U.S. Commitment for the 21st Century" to more than 100 students, faculty and local authorities. The Ambassador highlighted U.S. engagement with Latin America, particularly with Chile, which received ample media coverage.

¶9. (U) The Ambassador then attended a dinner hosted by UMAG Rector Victor Fajardo joined by Vice-Rector for Academics and Dean of Economic Sciences and Law Schools, Luis Poblete; Vice-Rector for Administration and Finance, Dr. Jose Maripani; Secretary General, Ana Mara Nazal; Director of Communications and Outreach, Monica Buvinic; and American Corner Coordinator, Marilin Lobos.

Torres del Paine National Park Turns 50

¶10. (U) The Ambassador on May 13 participated in the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of Torres del Paine National Park. Against the stunning backdrop of Torres del Paine, the Executive Director of CONAF, Catalina Bau, the Intendente of Magallanes and Antarctica, Mario Maturana, and local historian Mateo Martinic all paid homage to the Park in a ceremony that celebrated its history, honored its directors, rangers and supporters and highlighted its natural beauty.

¶11. (U) The event moderators read a congratulatory letter from the Department of State Acting Assistant Secretary, Ambassador Reno Harnish. Several of the speakers highlighted U.S.-Chile cooperation, and CONAF Regional Director Juan Jos Romero and current park Director Jose Linnebrink thanked the Ambassador personally after the ceremony. After the official part of the ceremony, an enthusiastic crowd welcomed a performance by one of Chile's most beloved musical groups, los Jaivas.

Positive Press Coverage on U.S.-Chile Parks Collaboration

¶12. (U) Several media agencies interviewed the Ambassador after the commemorative event. He emphasized the magnificence of Torres del Paine and the excellent collaboration between the U.S. and Chile in the areas of environment, conservation and park management. He also highlighted on-going U.S. engagement with Torres del Paine, including: the Sister Park Agreement with Yosemite (ranger exchanges, sharing of best practices); annual trail maintenance by participants in the California-based Conservation Volunteers

International Program (Conservation VIP); and, the English for Parks Program, which provides English language instruction to park rangers.

¶13. (U) Overall, the entire trip received positive coverage in the media. Information, pictures and video clips (on YouTube) about the visit are posted on Embassy Santiago's website.
SIMONS